

Improving Water Resources Management



Watershed in the Caucasus.



Demonstration of water saving products, Earth Day, Aqaba, Jordan.

CHALLENGES

Every country and community depends on water to maintain its population, promote economic growth, and protect its natural environment. Managing the equitable use and allocation of limited water supplies requires harmonized policies and laws, and strong institutions to carry out public mandate. It also requires technical capacity to undertake the necessary hydrological assessments that are needed to drive sound planning, permitting, monitoring, and adaptive management.

Distribution of freshwater, however, rarely conforms to humans' administrative or political divisions. Shared river basins, for example, cover 50 percent of the globe, are home to 40 percent of the world's people and contribute 60 percent of total freshwater flows. As competing demands on this increasingly scarce resource grow, the potential for tensions will heighten, placing current cooperative relationships at risk, and raising the possibility of conflicts over water rights, allocations and use in regions around the globe. As such, water resources management is more than a technical issue. It is one that requires skillful diplomacy and political leadership as well.

USAID RESPONSE

Improving water resources management requires meeting immediate needs, while protecting water quality and ensuring that future water demands can be met. Decades of experience in the water sector has taught The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) that investing in policy and legal reforms, building local capacity, and strengthening water resources planning, management, and governance yield more lasting change than investments in infrastructure.

USAID addresses issues of water quantity and quality through cross-cutting programs that incorporate the following elements of integrated water resources management:

- Strengthening of policy, regulatory, and institutional frameworks that address planning and permitting at the appropriate scale and across all relevant sectors.
- Supply optimization, including assessments of surface and groundwater supplies, water balance, wastewater reuse, and environmental impacts.
- Demand management, including cost-recovery policies, water use efficiency technologies, and decentralized water resource management authority.



Developing farm plans to improve watershed management at ground level in the Panama Canal Watershed.



Uncontaminated waters are crucial for local fishing economies.

- Equitable access to water resources through participatory and transparent governance
- Financing to sustain investments in water resources management and protection
- Attention to hydrologic variability and climate change and taking actions to mitigate and minimize impacts of droughts and floods.

FEATURED PROJECTS AND PUBLICATIONS

- In the Dominican Republic, USAID is working closely with farmers in three micro watersheds to establish functioning watershed management committees. The committees are responsible for post-hurricane rehabilitation of the watersheds, and establishing plans for the longer-term development and management of these resources.
- In Panama, USAID continues to assist the Panama Canal Authority and the National Environmental Management Authority to establish functioning Watershed Management Councils and effective watershed management. The Councils are completing action plans for sub-watersheds, focusing on zoning for multiple-uses, including that for economic growth and conservation.
- In Honduras, USAID programs have assisted the development of seven watershed management plans and are promoting stakeholder engagement in planning, implementation, and ongoing monitoring. Technical assistance in support of the new National Water Policy is being provided including a study to determine how best to integrate payments for environmental services (PES) into national water tariffs.
- In the Philippines, USAID assists local governments to identify economically feasible pollution control and wastewater treatment technologies to improve the quality of receiving waters to protect human health, biodiversity, and tourism sector investments. Activities to promote water conservation and pollution control are coupled with solid waste management as the basis for major citizen involvement campaigns throughout the islands.
- USAID recently completed a methods guide on *Managing Freshwater Inflows to Estuaries*, and is currently working on a *Water Sector Programming Guide* to assist mission personnel and partners in program design and technical oversight.

For more information, please visit:

www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross_cutting_programs/water